

When I am not tending vegetables destined for your homes, I spend much of my time co-managing an organization (with Laura Henderson) called Growing Places Indy. We have a large demonstration and educational garden at the White River State Park that has played host to several groups of young people over the past few weeks. Partly because of that, I have found myself sharing food memories with various folks – young kids, adults, teenagers. One of my favorites has been on my mind lately, which I figured I would share with all of you.

My most vivid food memory involves my son, Ian, who will be turning four on August 3rd. Ian's mother and I had set out a bunch of tomato plants in our front yard during the spring preceding his birth. The plants were in five gallon buckets, lined up in a row in front of our house. (These plants became a navigational tool that we used when meeting new folks or directing people to our house, "You'll see the house – it's the one with all the buckets in front of it.") The plants were probably a little raggedy, and they had been started late, but they were an attempt to grow a little something in whatever space we had. It was ramshackle gardening, perfect for a busy intersection and two folks with other things on their minds.

I remember the week leading up to Ian's birth, the cherry tomato plants (the Sungold variety that some of you folks have been enjoying lately) had just begun to set fruit – small green globes that required a significant amount of imagination to conjure up some sense of edible nature, let alone something that would actually be enjoyable. But then, labor pains began, and the plants were forgotten for several days, as Ian was born and was marveled at and gazed upon. When we came back home, a couple of days later, I remember walking up the steps to our house and seeing small orange spheres bobbing amongst the stems of the tomato plants. The tomatoes had ripened, we were home with our son, and I remember remarking to myself that it continued to astonish me how the 'natural' world can seem to run so closely parallel to our own lives – as if one were constantly keeping track of the other in order to keep pace.

Almost four years have gone by, and much of our lives have changed. The past two years, though, have afforded me an unparalleled joy of picking that same Sungold variety with my son. We enjoy them in the field and around the dinner table. Ian often refuses to eat any other cherry tomato variety, preferring Sungolds to red or yellow varieties. For the most part, I think that this is simply because Sungolds are tastier than the others. However, there is a part of me that keeps thinking that Ian somehow relates more closely with these orange-colored cherry tomatoes - that a part of him remembers the smell of the plants as he was carried past them, that he was somehow 'marked' with this variety.

Perhaps it's absurd to think such things and to make connections from two seemingly-disparate events, but it is almost impossible to not do when I see this beautiful boy wandering through rows of tomato plants as his father once did almost exactly four years ago. It is a food memory that I hold quite close, especially at this time of year, and one that I look forward to sharing with Ian in future summers, our lives keeping pace with the seasons as we plant new seeds and continue to grow together.

In this week's share:

FULL

Slicing tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, leeks, cucumbers, summer squash, eggplant, peppers (jalapeno and sweet), carrots, basil

HALF

Slicing tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, leeks, summer squash, eggplant, jalapeno peppers, basil

Roasted Eggplant Soup

Ingredients

3 medium tomatoes, halved
1 to 2 medium eggplants, halved lengthwise, stem end trimmed
1 small onion, halved
2 leeks, cleaned and split lengthwise
6 large cloves garlic, peeled
About 1/4 cup olive oil
1 cup dry white wine
3 cups vegetable stock
1 cup heavy cream (optional)

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

3/4 cup (about 3 ½ oz) crumbled goat cheese, for garnish (optional)

Directions

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil. Spread the tomatoes and eggplant (flesh side up), onion halves, leeks and garlic in a single layer on the lined baking sheet. Coat them lightly with the oil. Roast for 45 minutes or until the vegetables are tender and browned in spots. (Some smaller pieces might be done sooner; remove from the oven earlier as necessary.)

When all the vegetables are done, scoop out the flesh of the eggplant and transfer to a large, heavy saucepan. Add the remaining roasted vegetables. Add the wine and 3 cups of stock and bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then reduce the heat to medium-low. Cover and cook until the onion is tender, about 45 minutes. Cool slightly.

Working in batches, puree the soup in a blender until smooth. Return the soup to the saucepan over medium-low heat. Add the cream (if using), stirring to combine. Use more stock or broth to thin the soup, if necessary. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Divide among individual bowls. Sprinkle with goat cheese (if using); serve warm but not hot.